

STEP

7.

Choosing Strategies: Developing a Multi-Faceted Campaign

TIME TO COMPLETE: 1 MONTH
(MAY NEED TO BE REVISITED THROUGHOUT CAMPAIGN)



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At this point in your campaign, you will have chosen one or more approaches to use in your campaign and your goals. In this Step, you will learn more about effectively using the major strategies to achieve your campaign goals. For each one you choose, you will need to answer the question “What specific actions will be undertaken?” and update/revise your campaign plan accordingly.

As a reminder, the major strategies include:

- Legislative and budget advocacy
- Executive/agency advocacy
- Litigation and judicial action
- Grassroots organizing
- Media outreach

How and when you use these techniques, and whether they are a support or a centerpiece to your campaign, will vary according to the specifics of your jurisdiction, as discussed earlier. Apart from litigation, however, your campaign must include all of these to at least some degree. For example, in your state, the juvenile justice agency may have the authority to close a youth prison, but you will still need legislative support because of the potential job losses.

Even if your legislature passes prison closure legislation driven by its judiciary committee, you’ll need to work with the budget committee to ensure that the funds saved are reinvested in community-based alternatives to incarceration. The executive branch, particularly the governor and the juvenile justice agency director, must also be addressed in your tactical decisions as they will have a lot of influence over legislation, budget, or programmatic changes.


"Working in coalition forced all of us to stretch outside our respective comfort zone. The lawyers realized that legal action wasn't going to solve the problem. The organizers realized that rallies weren't going to get it done. Policy advocates knew it couldn't be solved by legislation. We looked deeply at our system and worked together to execute a multifaceted campaign."

— **Derrick Johnson,**
in Breaking Down the Walls

Putting the pieces together

Launching a successful campaign to close youth prisons involves developing and deploying many elements, often on overlapping timeframes. Here are some of the key elements shared in this Toolkit:

Campaign Element	Definition	Example
Vision	What you want to create	A world without incarceration
Mission	What your campaign is seeking to do and how	<i>“RISE for Youth is a statewide, non-partisan campaign coalition whose central goal is to develop a continuum of community-based alternatives to incarceration that will keep juvenile justice system involved youth closer to their homes and support networks while making our communities safer.”</i>
Theory of Change/Values	How you will approach the work	<i>1)“We will center young people and families in our advocacy for transforming the juvenile justice system. 2)We will only achieve true public safety when we promote everyone’s well-being and when young people have the opportunity to heal and thrive. 3)We believe in trauma-informed, restorative, community-centered approaches that use the least restrictive environments available. 4)We believe in keeping families together and building solutions with the entire family. 5)We do not write off or give up on youth – young people deserve unconditional love.”</i> (From Youth Justice Milwaukee, see Step 3 for full list)
Approaches	Which pathway you will take to get there	Close youth prisons; Reduce incarceration; or Create community-based alternatives

Goals	What you want to achieve	Examples: Close a specific youth prison Pass legislation to demolish / repurpose the youth prison Invest the savings in community-based alternatives for youth Ensure oversight of how the funds are allocated
Targets	Individuals who have the power to give you what you want	Governor, specific lawmakers, juvenile justice agency director
Campaign Plan	How you will win / achieve your goals	Midwest Academy Chart/Close Tallulah Now! Strategy Chart (see Step 5 for examples)
Organizing Plan	The allies and constituencies you need to mobilize, and how you will do so	<i>See sample Organizing Plan in Step 6.</i>
Strategies	The approaches/types of advocacy you will use	Media outreach, legislative/ budget advocacy, executive/agency advocacy, community organizing, legal approaches
Tactics	Specific actions	Rallies or marches, letters to the editor, lawsuits, legislative briefings/ hearings
Message	The “brand” that encompasses what you stand for (including a logo and tagline)	 <i>Prison is no place for kids Prisons don't work</i>

Essential Tactical Strategy: Executive Branch Advocacy

The Governor’s office and the state juvenile justice agency (normally part of the executive branch), can exert enormous influence over the closure or expansion of youth prisons, as well as funding of community-based alternatives. Although some youth prisons are operated at the state level, and some are run by counties, the governor will always be a target in your work. You will first need to determine whether he or she has a strong position on the issue, and if not, whether you can influence him or her.

Since the governor often appoints the head of the juvenile justice agency as part of his/her cabinet, you can potentially impact the issue by recommending people for your governor to appoint to this position. These appointments are often considered after a new governor has been elected during the transition process so it is important to get recommendations to the transition team during the period after the election and before the governor’s inauguration.

It will be crucial for someone in your campaign coalition to establish a working relationship with the juvenile justice agency director. It is also good to have other connections with senior staff in the agency who are civil servants (i.e., their positions don’t change when a new agency head is appointed) and to sign up for newsletters and updates from the agency.

Tip: Reviewing your governor’s past public statements, including media interviews and responses to candidate questionnaires, can help you determine where he or she stands on youth justice issues, as well as potentially offering a way to hold him or her to past promises (e.g., investing in children).

If your governor can be convinced to support your campaign, you will need to determine how to aid him or her (e.g., by providing research, helping gain positive press) and how to turn that support into action (e.g., an executive order or deal with the legislature). If your governor cannot be convinced to support closing youth prisons or to at least not act against your efforts, you must tackle the much more difficult task of neutralizing that opposition. This means that media outreach and public opinion will become an essential part of your campaign. If the governor has an election coming up, you can also use that as an opportunity (see Youth First’s *Your Vote is Your Voice: A Toolkit for Youth Justice and Electoral Advocacy*.)

You may also need to influence local level executive branch leaders, for example the mayor of the city where a youth prison is located or where most of the youth in your prisons come from, or the county executive of a county-administered prison. In those cases, an organizing strategy that focuses on their constituents (e.g., residents of that city or county) will be key.

Essential Strategy: Legislative and Budget Advocacy

Why Get Involved with “Legislative Advocacy”?

Your messaging, direct actions, and organizing tactics will help create the public will—and the pressure—for change, but often the mechanism for this change to happen will be a change in the law, regulations, or official agency policies. Having changes made at this level will institutionalize them in a way that will live on when key leaders or decision-makers change.

Budget advocacy is a key part of legislative advocacy because funding—or lack thereof—drives action. Getting rid of funding to build capacity for more prison beds or hire guards can decrease incarceration, and having adequate funding for essential community-based services is key to ending over-reliance on residential placements. As many campaigns are seeking to reinvest the dollars from youth prison closures to community-based alternatives to incarceration, the budget process is where this “reinvestment” can take place.

Tip: The research and data gathering you have done will also support your legislative advocacy. The reports and fact sheets you create can be shared with legislative staff as the grounds or rationale for policy changes you request.

Legislative Action—What to Advocate for?

Youth First’s Legislative Options for Youth Decarceration Reform (available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/>), outlines the key elements that legislation should include in order to increase public safety, decrease the number/proportion of youth of color in prison, and realign funding to approaches that work:

Closing Youth Prisons

Legislation aimed at closing prisons should:

- Explicitly require the closure of a youth prison, including a concrete timeframe for closure (e.g., within 2-3 years).
- Zero out funding for youth prisons in agency budgets.
- Ensure that the building can no longer be used to house youth and direct the relevant agencies to find a productive use for the abandoned prison building or demolish the building and be sure to preserve some of the funds freed up from closure for these purposes.

- Ensure that the Department of Labor or local economic development agencies help create or connect affected workers to jobs in other areas.

Community Reinvestment

Legislation (or budget provisions) should ensure that money saved on incarceration is used to support youth by requiring that:

- All money saved from closing a youth prison is reinvested and follows the youth in the most impacted communities, funding programs and services for youth in their communities.
- Fiscal incentives, including reimbursement by the state, are offered to counties to keep youth in their communities.
- Local continua of care⁽²⁾ for youth involved in the delinquency system are supported and strengthened or created if they do not currently exist.

Closing the Front Door

Legislation should decrease the number of youth entering the system and therefore possibly being adjudicated to a youth prison by:

- Forbidding youth from entering a youth prison or other secure facility for misdemeanors.
- Ensuring the state is complying with federal law prohibiting the detention of status offenders, and is not using the “valid court order” exception.
- Prohibiting incarceration of youth under a certain age (e.g., 15).
- Only allowing incarceration for youth who pose a serious risk to public safety.
- Ensuring that youth who are victims of domestic violence, labor or sex trafficking, or who have committed “survival crimes”⁽³⁾ are diverted from the justice system and receive services and supports instead of being criminalized.
- Requiring that courts, prosecutors, and probation officers use a structured decision-making or other evidence-supported tool that reduces the use of overly restrictive placements.
- Supporting, spreading, or creating diversion programs that serve as alternatives to arrest and court-involvement, as well as opportunities at each point of contact with the juvenile justice/court system for youth to remain in their communities and

2.) A continuum of care is an array of meaningful non-residential community-based programs, supports, resources and services specifically designed to meet the individual needs of young people and their families to build on their strengths and assets and keep them from committing crimes and entering detention or youth prisons. For more information and a step-by-step guide to creating a continuum, see *Beyond Bars: Keeping Young People Safe at Home and Out of Youth Prisons*.

avoid incarceration.

- Requiring data collection or supporting research efforts to understand how certain marginalized groups of youth (LGBTQ, girls, Native Americans) enter the system that may identify potential discriminatory trends and practices of arrest and incarceration.

Closing the Back Door

Legislation should ensure youth do not stay in youth prisons unnecessarily by:

- Explicitly forbidding secure detention for non-violent acts and/or decreasing the amount of time youth can be incarcerated for probation violations.
- Shortening length of stay guidelines and reducing the use of unnecessary residential “step-down” programs. Research indicates the longer young people stay in youth prisons, the more harmful the outcome.
- Eliminating fines and/or fees for youth in contact with the justice system, as the inability to pay such fines and fees may add additional time to a youth’s sentence.
- Ensuring youth have quality legal representation post-disposition and at all earlier stages.

Note that some of the above may also be able to be accomplished through regulatory action, but in all cases an **implementation plan and oversight** will be key. Any legislation closing youth prisons should include language on the implementation of the closure, including a committee/task force, composed of key stakeholders, such as youth and families most impacted, to assure appropriate oversight of the development and execution of the implementation plan.

Direct Action

Campaigns to close youth prisons will likely need to employ a mix of strategies to achieve their goals. One of the more important and most effective is organizing *direct actions*. These are events in which community members take action to effect change. Since direct actions will generally be planned and carried out once your campaign has launched, they are discussed in more detail in Step 12. (Direct actions can also be carried out as part of your campaign launch event, which is discussed in Step 11.)

3.) Youth living in poverty or homelessness, or who fear for their safety, may be arrested or charged for life-sustaining acts such as sleeping in public spaces or abandoned buildings, or stealing food or money to buy food or shelter.

Tip: Many legislative offices are extremely tuned into social media. Take advantage of this by tweeting important media coverage “at” key legislators, tagging them in posts, or using social media to publicly invite them to events or call on them to take action.

Possible Tactical Strategy: Litigation

Your campaign also may want to work with local civil rights legal groups (e.g., ACLU state chapter) or other groups that focus on juvenile justice and have the capacity to bring a lawsuit to challenge the conditions of confinement. A lawsuit alone will likely not result in youth prison closure, but it can help show why these facilities are so terrible, and it can support your other strategies, e.g., generate media attention, put pressure on the legislative and executive branches. Depending on the federal agency climate at the time, your campaign may also want to file a complaint with the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division, which could also lead to, or support, litigation.

"In California, in conjunction with the statewide litigation and legislative work, advocates made sure that county-based stakeholders were informed about conditions in the state-level youth prisons and that judges fully understood and felt empowered to use their authority to remove youth from state prison if expected services were not being provided. Counties acted on this information: some declared a moratorium on sending children to state prison; others sent probation officers to visit all the confined youth from their county."

— *Breaking Down the Walls*